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ABSTRACT

Although many studies have been undertaken by literary critics and stylisticians on African English literary texts generally and Nigerian English prose fiction specifically, there has been little or no analysis of dialogue and discourse in such texts. An examination of the phenomenon of speech as manifested in conversational pieces in Nigerian English prose fiction may not only enhance further interpretation of the text but may also point to the organization of social interaction among Nigerians; particularly as Nigerian English literary texts express indigenous culture and world views. In this article, the function of dialogues in the overall development of Nigerian English prose fiction is explored and an attempt is made to see whether the fictionalized dialogues have relevance for discourse realities within the Nigerian social system. In addition to providing an overview of the major characters and themes of Nigerian fiction, this analysis of an Igbo English literary text seems to support the hypothesis that Nigerian English discourse structure in literary texts is to some extent governed by socio-cultural factors (such as age and achievement) present in the society itself. (Contains 30 references.) (JL)

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by Femi Akindele

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DIALOGUE AND DISCOURSE IN A NIGERIAN ENGLISH FICTION[1]

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1. Introduction

Several studies have been undertaken by literary critics and stylisticians on African English literary texts generally and Nigerian English prose fiction specifically. But little or no analysis of dialogue and discourse in such texts have been considered. Yet, it does seem that an examination of the phenomenon of speech as manifested in conversational pieces in English prose fiction may not only enhance further interpretation of the text but may also point to the organisation of social interaction among Nigerians. This is particularly so when one considers the fact that Nigerian English literary texts have their own peculiarities based on the expression of indigenous culture and world views.

In this article, the function of dialogues in the overall development of Nigerian English prose fiction is explored. The article explores how the organisation of conversation enhances theme development and character differentiation. The article also makes an attempt to see whether the fictionalised dialogues have relevance for discourse realities within the Nigerian social system.

2. Nigerian English prose fiction as a bilingual phenomenon

Any Nigerian English literary work is a bilingual phenomenon which relates to linguistic and socio-linguistic dimensions of language acquisition and usage. It is a translation of the people's world views or culture which may be linguistic or socio-

cultural. The level of translation varies according to the individual writer's point on the scale of bilingualism which can be represented as in Figure 1:

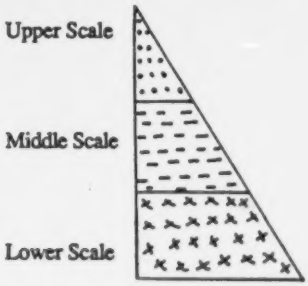

Figure 1. *Author's point on the scale of bilingualism.*

The upper scale is made up of sophisticated bilingual writers. This is the point on the scale where very literate Nigerian English writers can be located. Such writers include Chinua Achebe whose works are used as data in this paper, Wole Soyinka and Festus Iyayi[2]. The middle scale represents the location of writers that are literate but not very sophisticated, e.g. T. M. Aluko, Elechi Amadi[3]. At the lower scale are located writers that can be regarded as apparent translators in that they are not very literate in English, e.g. Amos Tutuola[4].

3. Literary criticism and stylistics approaches

Studies in African prose fiction and indeed Nigerian English prose fiction have largely been carried out by practitioners of literary criticism (see, for instance, Palmer 1972; Killam 1969). In the texts, issues such as characterization, plot, and theme or message are discussed. There is no discussion of the place of dialogues in the texts. Linguists have also started to work on African literary texts in English and specifically on Nigerian English prose fiction. This kind of linguistic work on stylistic features in the writings of Nigerian English prose writers marks a beginning in the examination of African

English literary texts from the linguistic viewpoint.

Oshundare (1979) takes Young's work further by focusing on bilingual and bicultural aspects of Nigerian prose fiction. He discusses in particular the bilingual and bicultural features shown in the styles of Tutuola, Ekwensi, Achebe, and Soyinka. This work shows some awareness of the use of English in Nigeria and some problem areas for the novelist as well as for the international community of readers.

Adejare (1981) attempts a linguistic analysis of a Nigerian English literary text. In examining the style of Wole Soyinka's selected texts, he proposes a textlinguistic approach based on systemic linguistics. He identifies three levels of meaning, Primitive, Prime Order, and Second Order, and links these with the concept of metaphor in language use. These, and other concepts like collocation, cohesion, and translation theory, are used to provide interpretations for the texts selected. The work can be regarded as one of the major efforts in the application of linguistics to non-native Nigerian English literary text analysis. It has contributed greatly to the general understanding of English as a second language and to the identification of an appropriate description of the features of a Nigerian English literary variety from the perspective of a writer's literary idiolect. However, the work does not consider the place of dialogues or conversations in the overall frame of the literary texts.

Oyeleye (1985) moves away from a general treatment of Nigerian English prose fiction to the specific literary genres of Chinua Achebe. He examines the 'language' of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the context of Nigerian English. He considers what he calls 'local colour' observed in both literate and semi-literate speech in the novels. These include the use of proverbs, wise cracks, and aphorisms. No particular linguistic analysis of these features is undertaken. They are simply considered as rhetorical devices in the hands of a practised conversationalist. Although conversation is considered as an important and highly skilful art in the novels examined, no attempt is made to examine its structural organisation.

4. The structure of dialogue in Nigerian English prose fiction

Efforts have been made to improve on the theories of discourse proposed by ethnomethodologists, such as Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974), and linguists, such as Sinclair & Coulthard (1975), and others. Such improvements vary from a consideration of discourse as an exchange system to its application to both highly structured and less structured conversational data (Coulthard & Brazil 1979; Harris 1980; Akindele 1986). Indeed efforts have been made lately to extend systemic network theory to the understanding of not only the exchange structure, but also that of global generic structures (Ventola 1979, 1987, 1988). Such discussions have proved to be very useful in the analysis of discourse (Ventola 1987).

In this section, we shall evaluate the development of generic structure theory and then show how it could help in analyzing the conversation pieces in a Nigerian English prose fiction. A working definition of the concept of 'dialogue' in this article may be useful at this point.

Dialogue as fictionalised conversation is considered as a sub-genre within the macro-genre of prose fiction which is "realised by register, which in turn is realised by language" (Butler 1989: 16). As a sub-genre, dialogue shows "how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (Martin 1985: 250). Immediately we notice a dynamic procedural emphasis. Genre, such as conversation, constraints the combinations of field, tenor, and mode selections which are legitimised in a culture. Genre has also been considered as "a typified socially recognized form that is used in typified social circumstances" (Dudley-Evans 1986: 1).

Berry (1981a, b, c) observes that there are problems with the linear approach to the analysis of interactional discourse proposed by Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) and the subsequent modifications of it (Coulthard & Brazil 1979; Burton 1980). She argues that a linear approach to exchange structure "does not allow one to take account of enough similarities and differences ... [but] different patterns of organization are observable in the discourse at the same time" (Berry 1981a: 121). She then proposes a

multilayered exchange system which enables the prediction of structures in an exchange.

Ventola (1987) observes that the Birmingham School model is very inadequate from the point of view of global generic structures. She points out that the analysis of categories and the structure of the highest unit, the lesson, is never reached and, further, that the global generic structures have largely been ignored. This problem has also been pointed out in my earlier work on family conversation (Akindele 1986).

Ventola and others have argued for the presentation of a text not only as a static product but also as a dynamic process. That is, when a person is involved in an interaction, the negotiation with the co-participant on how to proceed the interaction begins. In the process, the planned unfolding of the interaction may change, and these changes have to be matched (Martin 1985). (For a further discussion, see Ventola 1987, 1988.) In an attempt to account for both the product and process of interaction, Ventola (1987) modified Berry's (1981 a, b, c) proposed exchange systems and synthesized it with Martin's (1985) work on speech functions. This synthesis can prove helpful for the analysis of conversation pieces in Nigerian prose fiction, though some slight modifications are necessary due to the nature of the data. Hence we will summarise Ventola's presentation of the exchange structure of texts and show how it is related to the data given in this article.

Following Berry (1981a, c), Ventola (1979: 97) presents the following structural functional slot formula which constrains sequencing in moves:

((D X 1) X 2) X 1 (X 2 f (X 1 f))

This suggests that in an exchange, at least one slot X1 has to be realized. That is X1 is obligatory. Other functions are sequentially ordered so that DX1 may only precede X2, which may in turn occur before X1, which may only be followed by X2f, which in turn may be followed by X1f. The functional slots also determine each other's obligatoriness: X1 is obligatory, X2 presupposes the function X1 in an exchange, DX1 predicts both X2 and X1 and finally, X2f again presupposes X1 and X1f presupposes X1f. Each function can occur only once in an exchange.

The exchanges which are concerned with negotiating information are either knowledge-orientated or action-orientated. The X in the slots above can then be replaced by either K (knowledge) or A (action), (X1 = K1/A1).

The number 1 in K1 stands for the knowledge-orientated slot of a Primary Knower, the person who already knows the information (Berry 1981a: 126) and imparts it for the benefit of the other interactants, as in (1) from *A Man of The People* by Chinua Achebe.

(1) K1 0: I am a teacher at the Grammar Shool
A1 P: Here is your food master

A1 stands for the action-oriented slot of a Primary Actor; the person who is actually going to carry out the action (Berry 1981c: 23). (Note that the subsequent examples used in this article are from Achebe's *A Man of the People*, except for Examples (17) and (18), which are drawn from Achebe's *Arrow of God.)*

The Primary Knower or Actor does something for the benefit of the other participant present; the other participant present is the Secondary Knower or Actor. Having benefitted from a move in the Primary Knower or Actor slot, the Secondary Knower or Actor feels that he ought to acknowledge the preceding move. Such an acknowlegement is carried out in a K2f/A2f slot - the Secondary Knower's follow-up in knowledge and Action exchanges as shown in (2).

(2) K1 N: They are going to give me doctorate degree, Doctor of Laws LLD
K2f 0: That's great
A1 P: Here is your food master
A2f A: Oh thanks

In a K2, the Secondary Knower asks the Primary Knowler to impart knowledge for his benefit, as in (3).

(3) K2 MN: What do you want here
K1 0: I only came to say good bye

In contrast, in an A2 a request to the primary actor to do something for the benefit of the secondary actor is made, as in (4).

(4) A2 0: Can I have some brandy
A1 N: Of course

A K2 or an A2 may itself be optional, but, once realised it must be followed by a K1 or

an A1.

The Primary Knower or Actor may decide to delay the Kl or A1 slot; hence a DK1 slot or a DA1 slot. In a DK1, the Primary Knower delays his admission that he knows the information in order to find out whether the Secondary Knower also knows the information as in (5).

(5) DK1 A: What made Chief Nanga popular
K2 B: His village activities
K1 A: His political skill

In a DA1, the Primary Actor delays the action to ensure the acceptability of the action to Secondary Actor, as for example in (6).

(6) DA1 P: Can I bring your food master
A2 A: Oh yes
A1 P: I don put am for table sir

In an exchange, a DK1 or a DA1 slot must be followed by a K2 or a A2, which in turn must be followed by a K1 or a A1, which can optionally be followed by a K2f or a A2f. The choice of any of the sequences depends on whether the speaker of the first move in an exchange is orientated to 'A - events' or 'B-events' (Labov & Fanshel 1972; Labov & Fanshel 1977). In 'A-events', the first speaker has to be a Primary Knower or Actor. Thus the exchange classified as 'A-events' will start with a Kl or an A1 slot or a DKl or a DA1 slot as shown in (7).

(7) K1 Mrs. Akilo: My husband and I practise jointly
K2f 0: Oh
A1 Nanga: Here is your brandy Odili
A2f Odili: Thanks

If the slot is a DK1 or a DA1 in an 'A-event', the knowledge or action in the exchange is negotiated (delayed) whereas the non-negotiated A-events start with a K1 or a A1 slot. 'B-events' however, start with K2 or A2 slots. In 'B-events', A cannot be the first speaker because A is not the Primary Knower or Actor, as in (8).

(8) K2 0: Are you in private business
K1 Akilo: Oh yes
A2 A: Give me jolof rice Peter
A1 P: Yes sir

With an A1f, the Secondary Actor may acknowledge his appreciation of the Primary Knower's action done in benefit of the Secondary Actor, as shown in (9).

(9)

	DA1	O:	Shall I give master drink
	A2	Max:	Yes
	A1	O:	Okay
	A2f	Max:	Thanks
	A1f	O:	Not at all

A similar exchange can also be realised in a knowledge-orientated event. It is a kind of 'feedback on feedback' often used in casual conversation as a strategy for enforcing speaker change (see Ventola 1979, 1987: 101).

In an action exchange, an immediate action could take place, hence a slot A1: React. But when the action is postponed, because it cannot be performed immediately, then a slot A1: Assent is considered sufficient to complete an action exchange, as in (10):

(10)

	A1: Assent	P:	The food will soon dey ready sir I'll bring it quick
	A2f	A:	Okay
	A1: React	P:	(non-verbal action).

The knowledge- and action-orientated exchanges discussed above are examples of dialogues in Nigerian prose fiction as illustrated by these excerpts from Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*. There is, however, another type of exchange which I identified in family conversation and labelled a Prefatory (Akindele 1988). Ventola (1987) identifies such an exchange in service encounters and refers to it as attention-orientated and greeting exchanges. A prefatory-orientated exchange fixes the attention for the interaction and involves a Prefatory slot (Pr) which can be responded to in a Response to Prefatory (RPr) slot, as shown in (11).

(11)

	Pr	Of:	Odili
	RPr	O:	Sir
	Pr	Oduche:	Father
	Rfr	Ezeulu:	uhuh
	Pr	Oduche:	I have a word to say
	RPr	Ezeulu:	I'm listening

There are also two types of greeting exchanges observable in the prose dialogues. The first type is the opening greeting (Gr). The second type is the closing greeting, a Goodbye (Gb). Both have their corresponding pairs, a response to greeting (RGr) and a response to goodbye (RGb). Opening and Closing greetings are exemplified in (12) and (13) respectively.

(12) Gr 0: Good morning Mrs. Nanga
RGr MN: Morning Odili
Gr N: Hello! Odili my great enemy
RGr 0: Hello

(13) Gb Max: Goodbye Odili
RGb 0: Bye Max

The dialogues in Nigerian prose fiction further manifest 'dynamic moves' in exchanges labelled as 'suspending moves' (Ventola 1987: 105-107). These types of moves have been recognised by a number of conversational analysts and have been given various labels - 'side sequences', 'insertion sequences', 'repairs', etc. (see Jefferson 1972; Goffman 1976; Burton 1980; Harris 1980; Martin 1985; Akindele 1986).

Suspending moves are used as "a kind of tracking device which focus on experiential content of a preceding move and check to make sure it has been heard correctly" (Ventola 1987: 105). They concentrate on checking and giving assurance about the transmission of knowledge or action. They could be 'challenges', 'checks', 'back-channels', etc. These dynamic moves help to capture participants' orientation to the making of conversation. A check (check) and a response to a check (rcheck) are illustrated in Example (14) and a backchannel move (bch) in Example (15).

(14) K2 0: Who's she
check A: who
rcheck 0: The girl with the Minister
K1 A: His girl friend
K2f 0: I see

(15) K1 0: We met at the day Chief Nanga lectured...
bch Eddy: Yes
K1 0: I am a teacher at the Grammar School
bch Eddy: Uhuh

The preceding discussion has briefly touched on some aspects of the organisation of conversation in Nigerian English prose fiction. In the next section I shall analyse conversation pieces in some of the texts selected for this study and then attempt to show how they help to highlight theme(s) and character differentiation.

5. Analysis of the dialogic texts

It seems appropriate here to discuss the choice of the text selected as data. Chinua

Achebe's *A Man of the People* has been chosen for the analysis. The text is a political satire, that is, an expose of ministerial incompetence and corruption, social inequalities, rigged elections, thuggery, poverty and disease, female oppression, mass indifference and cynicism, and intellectual bankruptcy. Achebe's literary idiolect is written from the perspective of Igbo culture. The Igbos are one of the three major ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria. The remaining two are Hausa and Yoruba[5]. Achebe represents Igbo world views and sensibilities in his literary texts. In addition to Achebe's *A Man of the People*, references are made to *Arrow of God* by the same writer for the purpose of comparison. In analysing the dialogues in the literary texts used as data, I have tried to identify each of the participants in brackets immediately after the contributions, for example, OF: Shut up (shouted my father), is Odili's father (OF) in line 23 of Example (16).

In Example (16) below, Chief Nanga, the politician, opens the conversation with an opening greeting. He greets a much younger participant, Odili, in the discourse. It is interesting to note that the greeting is not a genuine one but rather a sarcastic one in nature, as shown in line 1. We know this is so because it is very unusual in this type of culture for an older person to greet the younger person first in a social interaction. The older participant would only do this in a sarcastic manner, or if the younger one did not see him at first sight. The subsequent knowledge-orientated exchanges produced by both Chief Nanga, the politician, and Odili's father, who is also present, suggest that there is a quarrel between Odili and the politician.

(16) N = Nanga; O = Odili; OF = Odili's father; * = Point of interruption

N:	Hello! Odili, my great enemy (greeted Chief Nanga in most daring assault)	1) Opening Greeting/ Prefatory Exchange
O:	Hello (I said as flat as the door)	2
OF:	Did you see the Chief Honourable Minister yesterday (asked my father severely)	3
O:	No	4
N:	Let him be sir (Chief Nanga)	5
	He and I like to say harsh things to each other	6
	Don't worry about Odili, sir	7
OF:	Yes -	8
	But he should wait till he builds his own house then he may put his head into a pot there - not here	

12

	in my house.	9
	If he has no respect for me why should he carry his foolishness to such an important guest (said my father)	10
N:	Never mind sir	11
	I'm no guest here	12
	I regard here as my house and yourself as my father	13
OF:	Yes	14
N:	They hear that Chief Nanga has eaten 10 percent commission and they begin to break their heads and holder up and down	15
	They don't know that all the commissions are paid into party funds	16
OF:	That's right (said my father knowingly)	17
O:	I suppose your new 4-storeyed building is going to be party headquarters (I asked)	18
OF:	Chief the honourable Minister was not taking to you (said my father louldly)	19
0:	Naturally he wouldn't because he knows I know what he knows*	20
N:	What*	21
0:	*The buses, for instance, we all know are for carrying the party, and the import duty...*	22
OF:	Shut up (shouted my father)	23) Regulatory Negative Exchange
	Keep quiet (I carefully withdrew from the talk)	24) Regulatory Negative Exchange
N:	Leave him alone, sir	25
	When he finishes advertising his ignorance I will educate him (said Chief Nanga)	26
OF:	Thank you	27
N:	Have you finished, Mr. Nationalist	28
OF:	Don't mind him, Chief	29
	Let us go into the house (said my father)	30
N:	(he goes in with Odili's father)	31
OF:	Odili (shouted my father)	32
0:	Sir (I answered full of respect)	33
OF:	Come in here (he said)	34
0:	(goes in) (I took my time to get up and walk over)	35
OF:	Sit down - we don't eat people (he said to me)	36
0:	(sits down) (I sat down ostentatiously)	37
OF:	When a mad man walks naked it is his kinsmen who feel shame not himself	38
N:	Yes (acknowledged Chief Nanga)	39
OF:	So I have been begging Chief Nanga for forgiveness on your behalf	40
	How could you go to his house asking for his help and eating his food and then spitting in his face	41
0:	I did not*	42
OF:	Let me finish	43) Regulatory Negative Exchange
	You did not tell me all these things-that you abused him in public and left his house to plot his down fall.	44
0:	I did...*	45
OF:	I said let me finish	46) Regulatory

		Negative Exchange
	Not that you even say anything to me, why should you	47
	Do I know book?	48
	Am I not of the Old Testament	49
O:	I...*	50
OF:	Let me finish	51) Regulatory Negative Exchange
O:	(non-verbal)	
OF:	Inspite of your behaviour Chief Nanga has continued to struggle for you and has now brought you the scholarship to your house On top of that he has brought you £250.00 if you will sign this paper (he help up a piece of paper)	52
N:	Don't say I am interrupting you, Sir (said Chief Nanga)	53)Permission-Seeking Exchange
OF:	Go on (said my father)	54
N:	I don't want Odili to misunderstand me	55
	I'm not afraid of you. You will lose your deposit and disgrace yourself	56
	I'm only giving you this money because I feel that after all my years of service to my people, I deserve to be elected unopposed so that my detractors in Bori will know that I have my people solidly behind me	57
	That is the only reason I am giving you this money	58
	I know those irresponsible boys have given you money	59
	We know where the money come from	60
	We will deal with them after the election	61
	We will show them	62
OF:	Uhuh - yes	63

(from Chinua Achèbe's *A Man of the People*, pages 24-25)

Of particular interest to the discourse analyst is the way the organization of the turn-taking system contributes to the understanding of the genre. Social hierarchy based on age is shown to be a factor and Chief Nanga is portrayed to dominate the conversation. But, the control of the discourse is in the hands of Odili's father, with Chief Nanga joining into the talk as a kind of an 'equal' conversational partner. That Chief Nanga is subordinate to Odili's father in terms of age in the conversation is shown by his use of 'Sir' in lines 5, 7, and 11.

In contrast, Odili, a young school teacher is portrayed as a participant who occupies a lower social position in the interaction. His contributions are made minimal and are only allowed when his father decides that he (his father) has finished with his talk. He is thus asked not to initiate any talk, but only to respond to certain allegations made

against him.

Interruption is a phenomenon of discourse that speakers are expected to try to avoid. Younger co-conversationalists are in fact 'forbidden' to interrupt older participants in the Igbo culture. Hence Odili is censored every time he wants to cut into his father's turn and make his contributions. This is marked by *Shut up* (line 23), *keep quiet* (line 24), *Let me finish* (line 43), *I said let me finish* (line 46), which initiate what I have labelled 'Regulatory Negative exchanges' in my study on Yoruba English discourse (Akindele 1988: 113). The fact that Odili is reprimanded by his father for interrupting him is a demonstration of the power associated with the hierarchy of higher social status and evidence of the subordinate role that younger conversationalists are expected to play not only in interactional activities but also in the decision-making process.

The demonstration of the power of social status is further hightened in lines 32-37 in Example (16) when Odili's father employs very strong 'Directives', *Come in here, Sit down,* which Odili complies to immediately. All these have some implications for the character differentiation in *A Man of the People*. First, these show that a person like Nanga, despite being a semi-literate, considers himself more qualified and suitable for a leadership post than Odili - a young, energetic, and very literate school teacher. Second, Chief Nanga's place within the social hierarchy may also account for his corruption, political thuggery, rigging of elections, mass indifference to people's yearning. He has access to power because of the support he receives from semi-literate associates like Odili's father. Odili, on the other hand, is a character who is not only poor but lacks both the social and the economic power to challenge the atrocities of Nanga. Odili is repressed by the society which considers him worthless in terms of leadership, though literate.

The turn taking system in Example (16) points to one significant underlining message of the text in this genre. This has to do with the concept of democracy which the politicians intend to usher in. In fact, democracy is questionable in this context because of the apparent 'inequalities' in social activities and indeed in the decision-making process in the society. One can thus argue that the concept of democracy being

preached in the genre is a farce. The notion of age worship is further strengthened in Example (16) when Chief Nanga (though a wealthy man and higher than Odili's father in terms of social status based on achievement), before cutting in, seeks permission to initiate a series of exchanges. He does this by using the 'permission-seeking' type of Prefatory exchange, *Don't say I'm interrupting you, sir,* after which he is allowed to *Go on* (see lines 53-54; for Prefatory Exchanges, see Akindele 1988: 107). Chief Nanga's deference to Odili's father can partly be interpreted as respect for age and partly as a means of eliciting support from the older group which in turn controls the younger ones.

The extract also reveals the theme of corruption. Chief Nanga is portrayed through the conversation piece as a corrupt, shameless, and heartless politician who could do anything to remain in power. Politics is also shown to be a dirty exercise which people of Nanga's type engage in. Indeed, Odili's father is shown to be a person of Nanga's type who does not see anything wrong in bribery, corruption, and the act of wasteful spending of government funds. Odili is portrayed in the scene as a person who is determined to stop Chief Nanga from continuing with his political thuggery. He is a man who would not be lured by mere material wealth, hence his rejection of Nanga's offer of scholarship and money.

The theme of oppression of women created in Nigerian prose fiction is illustrated in Example (17) below. Women are considered as instruments to be used and dumped whenever a better alternative can be found. They are not seen as objects to be honoured and respected but are rather perceived as baby-producing machines. Example (17) illustrates the image of women in the fictionalised society created in *Arrow of God,* also attested in almost all Achebe's works.

(17) Ezeulu = father; Obika = Son, Matefi = mother

Ezeulu:	What is it, my son	1
Obika:	Nothing	2
Matefi:	What is it, Obika	3
Ezeulu:	Keep quiet	4) Regulatory Negative Exchange
Matefi:	(non-verbal)	5
Ezeulu:	What did you see, Obika	6

Obika:	A flash of lightning	7
Ezeulu:	What happened when you saw it	8
Obika:	I know it was a spirit my head swelled	9
Ezeulu:	What did he look like	10
Obika:	Taller than any man I know	11
Ezeulu:	You have seen Eru, the magnificent, the one that gives wealth to those who found favour with him	12

For instance, in Example (17) the social status of Matefi, the wife of Ezeulu, is reduced to the level of that of her children. Ezeulu is totally in control of the conversation, and immediately Matefi attempts to make her own contribution without first seeking permission from her 'boss', she is reprimanded by, for example, *Keep quiet* (line 4). It should be noted that although socially she and Ezeulu can be placed on the same social hierarchy within the family setting, her sex leads to a sub-stratification within the hierarchy, which makes her a subordinate to the male sex.

It is also interesting to note that 'proverbs' which are considered as the exclusive linguistic and conversational strategy province of elders are mostly produced by the male. It is only on a few occasions that women are portrayed using them in Achebe's texts. Their effective use symbolises the power and status of the speaker within the exclusive world of male politics and public affairs: a world in which women do not participate and from which they are seen to be conspicuously absent. This creates the impression of linguistic and intellectual apartheid.

Structurally, out of the long stretches of conversation in Examples (17) and (18), only a small fraction is produced by women or they play a role in the passages. Women's talk occurs when women join others in responding to a man's initiation which draws ovation or surprises from the audience, or when women are overtly or covertly requested to make their contributions to the ongoing discourse. The organisation of the conversation in Examples (17) and (18) is thus a demonstration of the employment of social hierarchy in relation to the use of power and the dominance of women by men.

The structure of father/children conversation is revealed in (18) below.

(18) Ezeulu = father, Edogo = eldest son; Obika = son; Oduche = youngest son

Edogo:	Tomorrow is Afo	1

Ezeulu:	Yes	2
Edogo:	We have come to find out what work you have for us	3
Ezeulu:	How much of the work on the new homestead was still undone	4
Edogo:	Only the women's barn	5
	But that could wait	6
Ezeulu:	Nothing will wait	7
Edogo:	A wife should not come into an unfinished homestead	8
Ezeulu:	Yes	9
Oduche:	Father, I have a word to say	10) Permission-seeking Exchange
Ezeulu:	I am listening	11
Obika:	Perhaps they are forbidden to help their brothers build a barn	12
Edogo:	Has Oduche not worked as hard as yourself on your homestead	13
Obika:	Yes	14
Ezeulu:	It is Oduche I'm waiting to hear, not you jealous wife.	15) Regulatory Negative Exchange
Edogo:	I am one of those chosen to go to Okperi tomorrow and bring the leads for our new teacher	16
Ezeulu:	Yes	17
	But tell them that tomorrow is the day on which my sons and my wives and my son's wife work for me	18
	Do you hear me	19
Edogo:	I hear you.	20

(from Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, pages 15-16)

As can be seen from Example (18), age is also given its place in the organisation of the talk. The older children, Edogo and Obika, and their father Ezeulu were given the higher social position in the hierarchy while Oduche occupies the lower position. The occupants of the higher position dominate and control the discourse while the younger one is relegated to the background. This is clearly shown in an attempt by Oduche to get into the pool of the on-going conversation. He uses the 'Permission-seeking' Prefatory Exchange characteristic of Yoruba family conversation to gain access to the talk; Oduche: *Father, I have a word to say* - Farther: *I'm listening* (for Prefatory Exchange, see Akindele 1988).

Interruption is also a phenomenon that seems to be 'forbidden' by other younger children in a father/children interaction in the fictionalised Igbo society; hence Obika is reprimanded when he attempts to punctuate his brother's contributions; Ezeulu: *It is Oduche I'm waiting to hear, not you jealous wife.*

6. Conclusion

I have in this article tried to show that conversation pieces in prose fiction could further the interpretation of a literary text. The discussion of the structure of the dialogues seems to have been able to give the reader some insights into some of the major characters and themes of the prose fiction. The analysis further points to the fact that age is a determinant factor in the fictionalised Nigerian English prose fiction just as it is in the social life of the people. The consequences of the analysis of sample dialogic data from Igbo English literary text seems to support the hypothesis made in my earlier work (Akindele 1986) that Nigerian English discourse structure when represented in literary texts, is to some extent, governed by socio-cultural factors such as age and achievement present in the society itself.

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Footnotes

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2 Festus Iyayi (1986) *Heroes*. Essex: Longman and Wole Soyinka (1965) *The Interpreters*. London: Heinemann.

3. Elechi Amadi (1966) *The Concubine*. London: Heinemann; Elechi Amadi (1969) *The Great Ponds*. London: Heinemann; T. M. Aluko (1982) *Wrong Ones in the Dock*. London: Heinemann.

4 Amos Tutuola (1953) *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. New York: Grove Press.

5 I have done extensive work on Yoruba social interaction and on Nigerian English literary texts. For details, see Akindele 1986, 1988, 1990, forthcoming.

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